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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MUSCAT 001185

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DEPT FOR INR/B, NEA/ARPI

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TAGS: [PINR](#) [PGOV](#) [MU](#)

SUBJECT: BIO: RAJIHA BINT ABDUL AMER BIN ALI, MINISTER OF TOURISM

REF: A. STATE 137596

1B. 04 MUSCAT 999

Classified By: Ambassador Richard L. Baltimore III.

Reason: 1.4 (b,d)

11. (C) Per ref A, the requested information on Oman's female Minister of Tourism is provided below, keyed to ref A para 3 format. Much of this information was provided previously in ref B.

12. (U) Rajiha bint Abdul Amer bin Ali, Minister of Tourism (since 2004)

1A. (U) Born: April 12, 1953; Mutrah, Muscat, Oman.

1B. (SBU) Personal and Career Data

-- Married to Murtadha bin Hassan bin Ali, chairman of the Economic Committee of the appointed Majlis al-Dawla and a prominent businessman. She has one son in his final undergraduate year at Syracuse University, New York, who would like to enroll in an MBA program in the U.S. or other Western country. The elder of her two daughters is a teacher in Oman (educated abroad, lived for a time in Holland), while the younger daughter graduated Sultan Qaboos University Medical School in May 2005 and plans to pursue specialized medical training abroad, possibly in the U.S.

-- Education: Undergraduate degree in Mathematics in Iraq. As of June 2004, she was working on a Ph.D. from Exeter University (UK).

-- Languages, other: A native speaker of Arabic, Minister Rajiha has strong English-language skills.

-- Career Data: She got her start in 1972 as a statistician with the Whitehead Consultant Group, which had been contracted to establish the Statistical Unit for the then-Center for Economic Development. She then served as the head of statistical services in the Sultanate as Director General in the Development Council, the precursor to the Ministry of Development, until 1988 before being elevated to Under Secretary for Planning Affairs at the Technical Secretariat of the Council. In 1994, she was appointed Under

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Secretary for Statistics and Data at the Ministry of

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Development; after the merger of the Ministries of Development and Economy, she became in 1997 Under Secretary for Development Affairs at the Ministry of National Economy. She was appointed Minister for Tourism upon creation of that new ministry on July 9, 2004. Among her other duties, she chairs the social investment committee of the Oman Society for Petroleum Services (OPAL); and was Rapporteur of the National IT Committee, which promotes e-government. She has also been a board member of the Sultan Qaboos University, of The Wave tourism project, the National Road Safety Committee and the Kuwait-based Arab Planning Institute.

1C. (C) Religious Sect

-- She is Shia, and has family origins believed to trace to Iraq via Bahrain. According to her secular husband, she is fairly religious, as are her children.

1D. (C) Influence on Country Leaders

-- Minister Rajiha enjoys a close working relationship with the powerful Minister of National Economy, Ahmed Abd al-Nabi Macki, as well as with Minister of Commerce and Industry Maqbool Sultan (both of whom are also Shia). Her husband was appointed by the Sultan to the State Council, where he chairs the Economic Committee. The two have bantered in the company of Embassy officers on their opposing views about the usefulness of the consultative State Council. Her husband is an outspoken businessman who occasionally writes opinion pieces in the national and regional press.

1E. (C) Reason for Appointment

-- Rajiha told the Ambassador that her appointment as Oman's third female minister came as a complete surprise to her. As one of the few female Under Secretaries in the government at the time, however, and having a solid professional reputation, her selection as a minister was, in retrospect, a natural choice. She told the media after her appointment, "When I was informed about the Royal Decree appointing me in a ministerial capacity, I had mixed feelings. I was excited, of course... (at) the same time, I was aware of the responsibilities and challenges.... Certainly the appointment reflects the emphasis placed by His Majesty the Sultan on supporting and encouraging Omani women to step forward and fully enjoy the rights extended to them and contribute wholly to the development of the country."

IF. (C) Views on the Sultan, His Policies, and on the U.S.

-- Both Rajiha and her husband have maintained very close relations with the Embassy through the years. She is responsive to Embassy requests, was pleased to participate with the Ambassador on a one-week Rule of Law Forum tour of Washington, New York and Dallas in 2004, and is complimentary of our Free Trade Agreement negotiations as well as of the Middle East Partnership Initiative. In her former position, she expressed interest in micro-business programs for low-income women, e-legislation, joint ventures to promote exports, dry farming, water conservation, and fisheries development.

-- Her husband has business dealings with U.S. companies, and served on the inaugural board of the Muscat American Business Council in 2004-05. She is fond of the U.S., particularly New York City, and was pleased that her children were able to study and have business internships there. She and her husband have hosted Embassy staff to an annual dinner, usually around Ramadan, for the past several years. They both made a brief appearance at the Deputy Chief of Mission's 2004 Christmas party.

-- In our many opportunities for informal chats with her, she has expressed only positive opinions on the Sultan and his policies, though her husband tends to be more critical. She has expressed frustration with government officials, however, including for latent gender bias and old-fashioned attitudes.

IG. (C) Grooming for Ministerial Position

-- Rajiha has enjoyed responsible positions in the government from the earliest years of the current Sultan's reign. Her close working relationship with National Economy Minister Macki likely also played a role in her elevation to ministerial rank.

IH. (C) Her Views on Timing of Her Appointment

-- See Section E above.

II. (C) Goals and Aspirations

-- Rajiha's entire career has been focused on development issues, and that is the approach she continues to take at the helm of the Tourism Ministry. She sees tourism as just another means for spurring human resource development, as well as for extending key infrastructure (transportation, telecommunications, commercial and service outlets) to more areas of the country. Given the priority that the Sultan has accorded to increasing tourism's share of GDP, it is unlikely that Rajiha might be transferred to another cabinet position in the next several years in order to give her ample time to get the new ministry established and large tourist infrastructure projects well on track. She is a positive influence on modernization issues (such as e-government) and liberalized trade.

IJ. (C) Meetings with U.S. Officials

-- Rajiha has a poised but relaxed rapport with USG officials, whether it be in Oman or on travel to the U.S. She is not gregarious, but does have a quiet sense of humor and a favorable disposition toward the U.S.

IK. (C) Religious Conservatives

-- Given the religious diversity in Oman, conservative attitudes toward women in high office are more of a social rather than religious phenomenon. She acknowledges that many Omani males feel threatened by the competition in the workplace that women increasingly represent, and that prevailing attitudes still place a premium on women's commitments to their family above careers. But those conservative currents in Omani society are not perceived as a physical threat.

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